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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000528

SIPDIS

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NSC FOR DAMON WILSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/29/2021

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: SMER COURTS INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE FOR COALITION PARTNERS

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 527

- [1B.](#) BRATISLAVA 521
- [1C.](#) BRATISLAVA 513
- [1D.](#) BRATISLAVA 506
- [1E.](#) BRATISLAVA 499
- [1F.](#) BRATISLAVA 494
- [1G.](#) BRATISLAVA 491

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).).

**11. (C) SUMMARY:** Following fast on the heels of Smer chairman Robert Fico's June 28 announcement of a Smer-SNS-HZDS coalition (Reftel A), Smer deputy international secretary Katarina Nevedalova invited Poloff to breakfast

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June 29 to "tell us personally" about the developments. Sheepish and clearly aware of the international community's disdain for HZDS Chairman Vladimir Meciar and SNS boss Jan Slota, Nevedalova told us that it was Smer's "only option." At least two of Smer's Vice Chairmen -- and the party's international desk -- tried hard to keep Fico from offering the parties partnership. Nonetheless, Fico believes his European socialist colleagues are accepting of the coalition.

Fico will travel to Strasbourg soon to engage them further. Smer will hold at least 24 senior positions in the new government, which may more than deplete its small pool of experienced, qualified leaders. END SUMMARY.

SMER THE MORNING AFTER: SHEEPISH, AWARE OF SCRUTINY

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**12. (C)** During a June 29 breakfast the morning after Robert Fico announced the formation of a Smer-SNS-HZDS coalition government (ref A), Smer deputy international secretary Katarina Nevedalova appeared sheepish about, but accepting of, the coalition. She said that she was against such a coalition and that Smer was well aware that it was the least acceptable government for the international community. However, it recently became Smer's "only option" after KDH faltered, and SMK -- which would only have joined Smer in a coalition with KDH or SDKU -- became too greedy in its demands.

KALINAK, PASKA STRONGLY AGAINST SNS, BUT...

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**13. (C)** Nevedalova -- who told us on June 20 that Smer Vice Chairman Robert Kalinak was so strongly opposed to working with SNS that he might leave the party if it joined Smer in a coalition -- said that Kalinak and Smer Vice Chairman Pavol Paska were strongly against cooperation "right up to the end," but felt they were left with no other options.

(COMMENT: Paska had told us earlier this week that this was a bad option, but preferable to fighting further over possible partners. We doubt this is the case, as Smer's position in such a coalition -- including 11 cabinet ministries, in addition to Prime Minister and Chairman of parliament -- gives it carte blanche to implement its agenda for the "token price" of a few minor ministries. The Smer-SNS-HZDS combination leaves Fico with no credible rivals on policy matters, as he prefers. END COMMENT.)

MINISTRIES UNCERTAIN, BUT SMER WILL GET MFA

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¶4. (C) Representatives from Smer, SNS, and HZDS are meeting June 29 to discuss the details of which party will get which ministries, but Nevedalova said Smer will control all of the "powerful" ministries -- including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, as well as the chairmanship of Parliament. She said that Slovak diplomat Jan Kubis, currently seconded to Javier Solana's office as EU Special Envoy to Central Asia, will likely be the next Foreign Minister. (COMMENT: Slovak contacts give Kubis generally good grades as a professional. END COMMENT.)

SMER THINKS EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS OK WITH COALITION...

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¶5. (C) Immediately following the election, Smer began reaching out to its colleagues in the Party of European Socialists (PES), sending them updates about the post-election process. Based upon this outreach, Smer believes that its coalition has the acceptance of its socialist partners. (NOTE: In the early days of coalition forming, Nevedalova and others told us that Smer was receiving pressure from its PES colleagues not to work with the nationalists.) Nevedalova told us that Smer hopes to push an aggressive program for improving the situation of

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Slovakia's Roma minority, and to protect the rights of the "Slovak minority" living in primarily Hungarian areas. She said the party heard from many Slovaks after the election who were pushing for cooperation with SNS, as many people feel it is "unacceptable" to have a Hungarian as Minister of Education, etc.

...BUT FICO WILL GO TO STRASBOURG TO MAKE SURE

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¶6. (C) Although confident Smer will still be welcome as a member of PES, Fico clearly understands that his new coalition with authoritarian former Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar and nationalist bigot Jan Slota faces an uphill public relations battle. As a result, soon-to-be Prime Minister Fico plans to travel to Strasbourg on July 5 to meet with other socialist Members of European Parliament to discuss his government.

HOW WE GOT HERE: FICO'S FEAR OF DZURINDA?

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¶7. (C) Nevedalova told us Smer was "surprised" with HZDS' "hard to get" routine after the elections. Noting that HZDS was desperate to return to power, Smer found it "funny" that the party seemed so reluctant to accept cooperation when first offered in the days following the vote. Similarly, Nevedalova hinted that Fico's decision to move forward immediately with a Smer-SNS-HZDS coalition may in fact be a back-handed compliment to Mikulas Dzurinda, who was working to put together a government of his own. Fico apparently felt that he needed to move quickly, to deprive Dzurinda of the chance to work his political magic and pull a coalition out of a hat. (COMMENT: We think Fico wanted to maximize his personal power over policy making. END COMMENT.)

¶8. (SBU) Septel will describe likely policy implications of

a Smer-SNS-HZDS coalition.  
VALLEE